



King County

Ron Sims

King County Executive

News Release

Date: September 27, 2005

Contact: Sandeep Kaushik 206-296-4010

Landmark study links smart community planning to good health

Residents of “walkable” communities have more opportunities to breathe cleaner air, drive fewer miles and lead healthier lifestyles, according to a landmark report released this week by King County Executive Ron Sims.

Sustaining prosperity and improving the livability of King County’s growing communities are the genesis of the *King County Land Use, Transportation, Air Quality and Health Study*. The report explores the linkage between how communities and transportation systems are built, and their effect on everything from driving habits to physical fitness.

Sims, who has gained national recognition for health care reform and intelligent growth management policies, said that, “The findings in this report are incredibly useful. This is a valuable tool for helping to plan new communities and improve existing ones, with an eye towards creating the healthiest living environment.”

The Study is the first of its kind for a local government. The report was conducted by nationally recognized researcher Larry Frank, who drew on experts from the fields of land use, transportation, air quality, health care, finance, architecture, and community advocacy.

“What this study tells us is: if we are going to solve our public health issues, we must address how we design and build our communities,” said Frank. “The solutions require all of us, working together.”

Among its findings, the study shows that:

- Residents of the most “walkable” areas of King County were more physically active – and less overweight – than those in areas with fewer pedestrian-friendly amenities.
- Better connected streets, sidewalks and pathways can increase transportation efficiency and reduce automobile dependency as well as improve air quality and the health of residents.
- Residents walk more when a variety of retail services are available nearby.
- Transit and walking go together - people choose to walk more when transit choices are near.



- The more interconnected the area, the fewer the miles that are driven.

Findings of the Study will be used as a tool to assist in the planning and evaluation of county policies and development projects that touch on issues including health care, housing, transportation, and recreation.

"In King County we are coming up with the best practices, guidelines and policies that promote healthy living and physical activity," said Dorothy Teeter, Interim Director and Health Officer for Public Health - Seattle & King County. For the last two years, the King County Overweight Prevention Initiative has been developing science-based actions, including priorities for the built environment now supported by the Study. "Our goal is to make the healthy choice the easy choice." said Teeter.

"We know that even small increases in walking and physical activity can have an impact on preventing obesity and chronic diseases," said Dr. Dan Lessler, a physician, Associate Director of Harborview Ambulatory Care and Associate Director of King County Steps to Health. "My patients find it much easier to walk a bit more each day if they live in a community that makes it safe and easy for them."

Dennis McLerran, Executive Director of the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency pointed to the study's conclusions on air quality and the built environment.

"The fact that well-connected street networks promote the reduction of greenhouse gasses is very compelling." said McLerran. "The data show that good planning can literally help clear the air."

Sims said the study also lends support to his commitment to build the nation's premier network of bicycle and pedestrian trails. The County is currently negotiating with Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad to acquire the right-of-way for a 47-mile multiple-use trail on the Eastside.

"Plus, we've just broken ground on the east Lake Sammamish Trail, which will complete a major segment between Marymoor Park and the City of Issaquah," said Sims. "These routes for recreation and alternative transportation are good for the environment, for reducing congestion and for the health of the residents of King County."

This release and related information are posted on the King County Executive's Web site, at <http://www.metrokc.gov/exec>

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